CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. In an email system having an email server coupled to a plurality of email applications, each having an email address, a method of determining status of a recipient email address, comprising

maintaining status of the recipient email address in a status table, wherein the table is searchable using an email address;

sending an inquiry from a sender application to the table with the recipient email address, when the sender application has resolved the recipient email address to send a message to the recipient email address, to determine the status of the recipient email address before the message is sent to the recipient email address.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the table is located in the server and the status indicates if (1) the email address of the recipient email address is not valid or no longer valid, (2) the recipient email address is set in an auto-reply mode, or (3) the auto-reply mode for the recipient email address is not set.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of recording status of the recipient email address further comprises the steps of

notifying the server of the status of the recipient email address from a recipient application that assumes the recipient email address when the recipient email address changes its status in message receiving and handling;

recording the new status of the recipient email address in the table.

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4.   The method of claim 1, wherein the step of sending an inquiry further comprises the steps of

determining in the sender application if the recipient email address has been specified;

if the recipient email address has been specified in the sender application, sending the inquiry from the sender application to the server with the recipient email address;

searching the table with the recipient email address for the status information of the recipient email address;

returning the status of the recipient email address to the sender application from the server.

5.   The method of claim 4, wherein the step of sending the inquiry is performed by a remote procedural call.

6.   In an email system having a first and a second email server coupled together and a first and a second plurality of email client applications coupled to the first and second servers, respectively, each having an email address, a method of determining status of a recipient email address, comprising

(A)   maintaining status of the recipient email address in a status table associated with the first server, wherein the recipient email address is assumed by one of the first plurality of applications, wherein the table stores status information of all of the first plurality of applications and is searchable with an email address;

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(B)   sending an inquiry from a sender application to the second email server for the status of the recipient email address when a user of the sender application has specified the recipient email address to send a message to the recipient email address, wherein the sender application is one of the second plurality of applications;

(C)   forwarding the inquiry from the second server to the first server;

(D)   searching the table with the recipient email address for the status of the recipient email address and returning the status to the sender application via the first and second email servers before a message is sent to the recipient email address.

7.   The method of claim 6, wherein the status indicates if (1) the email address of the recipient email address is not valid or no longer valid, (2) the recipient email address is set in an auto-reply mode, or (3) the auto-reply mode for the recipient email address is not set.

8.   The method of claim 6, wherein the step (C) further comprises the steps of

searching a second status table located in the second server for an entry associated with the recipient email address, wherein the second status table stores status of each of the second plurality of applications;

if the second server is not responsible for the recipient email address, then forwarding the inquiry to the first server.

9.   The method of claim 6, wherein the step (A) further comprises the steps of

notifying the first server of the status of the recipient email address from a recipient application that assumes the recipient email address when the recipient email address changes its status in message receiving and handling;

recording the new status of the recipient email address in the table by the first server.

10.　The method of claim 6, wherein the step of (B) further comprises the steps of

determining in the sender application if recipient email address has been specified;

if the recipient email address has been specified in the sender application, sending the inquiry from the sender application to the second server with the recipient email address.

11.　The method of claim 10, wherein the step of sending the inquiry is performed by a remote procedural call.

12.　In an email system having a sender and a recipient email client application and an email server coupled to the sender and recipient applications, a system of determining status of a recipient email address associated with the recipient application, comprising:

a status table in the server that stores the status of the recipient email address, wherein the table is searchable by an email address;

a status notification module in the server that causes the status of the recipient email address be stored in the status table;

a status check module in the sender application that sends an inquiry with the recipient email address to the status notification module when the recipient email address is determined in the sender application, wherein the status notification module accesses the status table with the recipient email address to obtain and return the status of the recipient email address to the sender application before the sender application sends any message to the recipient email address.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the status indicates if (1) the email address of the recipient email address is not valid or no longer valid, (2) the recipient email address is set in an auto-reply mode, or (3) the auto-reply mode for the recipient email address is not set.

14. The system of claim 12, wherein the status notification module receives the status of the recipient email address when the recipient email address changes its status in message receiving and handling.

15. The system of claim 12, wherein the status check module sends the inquiry using a remote procedural call.

16. The system of claim 12, wherein the status check module sends the inquiry by
    determining if the recipient email address has been specified;
    if the recipient email address has been specified, sending the inquiry to the server with the recipient email address.

17.   In an email system having a sender email client application coupled to a sender email server and a recipient email client application coupled to a recipient email server, a system of determining status of a recipient email address assumed by the recipient application, comprising:

a status table in the recipient server that stores the status of the recipient email address, wherein the table is searchable by an email address and the sender and recipient servers are coupled together;

a first status notification module in the recipient server that stores the status of the recipient email address in the status table;

a second status notification module in the sender server that forwards inquiries of the status of the recipient email address to the recipient server;

a status check module in the sender application that sends an inquiry with the recipient email address to the first status notification module via the second status notification module in the sender application when the recipient email address is determined in the sender application, wherein the first status notification module accesses the status table with the recipient email address to obtain and return the status of the recipient email address to the sender application before the sender application sends any message to the recipient email address.

18.   The system of claim 17, wherein the status indicates if (1) the email address of the recipient email address is not valid or no longer valid, (2) the recipient email address is set in an auto-reply mode, or (3) the auto-reply mode for the recipient email address is not set.

19.   The system of claim 17, wherein the second status notification

module searches a second status table located in the sender application for an entry associated with the recipient email address, wherein the second status notification module forwards the inquiry to the first status notification module in the recipient server if there is no entry in the second status table that is associated with the recipient email address.

20.   The system of claim 17, wherein the first status notification module receives the status of the recipient email address when the recipient email address changes its status in message receiving and handling.

21.   The system of claim 17, wherein the status check module sends the inquiry to the sender server using a remote procedural call when the recipient email address has been specified in the sender application.

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